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ABSTRACT

A study combined and compared the results of five national mail surveys of commercial radio and television stations conducted at intervals from 1976 to 1986 by the Radio-Television News Directors Association (RTNDA) to see how minority groups have fared in the news work force. Results indicated that in the 10 years studied, the minority share of the broadcast news work force decreased slightly, mainly through attrition by minority men, notably Black men. Members of minority groups have made little progress in moving into the management of news operations--while gaining slightly in radio news, they decreased in TV news. When minority news directors were found in television, they were not heading major network affiliates, but rather small-staffed independent stations. Findings also showed that not only have male members of minorities failed to increase their share of the broadcast news work force in recent years, but that their share has eroded. While women have impressively strengthened their presence in radio and TV newsrooms--their share is now just under a third of the work force--Blacks and other minorities have been exiting more often than entering. For Black women, the growth in female percentages has tended to offset the minority decline, leaving their numbers about where they were 10 years earlier. While the electronic media showed a better record than print media, Blacks (and Hispanics) remained underrepresented in broadcast news and the professions in general, especially in comparison with their population share, and in management positions in particular. (Tables of data and 19 notes are included.) (NKA)

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MINORITY EMPLOYMENT IN BROADCAST NEWS 1976-86

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MINORITY EMPLOYMENT IN BROADCAST NEWS 1976-86

For nearly two decades, broadcast news has had the official employment welcome mat out for black persons and members of other minorities. Pressures from minorities in the civil rights movement of the 1960s prompted television and radio stations to start hiring non-whites into professional positions, not just to the custodial and other service jobs to which they had largely been limited. But the real impetus came in 1968 when the Federal Communications Commission issued notice of proposed rules which it adopted in 1969 to require stations to establish and promote affirmative action programs for the hiring of members of minority groups.[1] It was no longer enough to stand ready in case a Carole Simpson or Bob Teague came knocking at the door.

Active recruitment was stepped up, as the FCC urged,[2] particularly for minorities as reporters, editors and other news personnel.[3] Universities were flooded with calls for black journalists and responded that few were there.[4] Columbia University launched a special summer program to train minorities for careers in TV and radio news.[5] In their crash catch-up efforts, stations hired black persons by the dozens, mostly untrained. By 1972, at least one member of a minority group was working in 60 percent of the TV newsrooms and 20 percent of the radio newsrooms responding in a national survey.[6] From nowhere to what seemed everywhere by comparison, for minorities, particularly black men, those were very good years.

But some said minorities were not doing as well as the FCC figures indicated. There were charges that blacks in particular were being hired largely to satisfy the affirmative action rule and in fact had little prospect for advancement in broadcasting.[7] Appearance and reality were not the same, said the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, concluding in a 1977 report that minorities and women tended to be "window dressing on the set."[8]

Into the 1980s, members of minority groups said they were still not finding a viable place in broadcast journalism. Black reporters said that often unconscious racism persisted in the nation's newsrooms and that blacks were treated as separate and unequal members of the "team."[9] A study of black women, a so-called "double minority," suggested that job problems more often came from being black than being female.[10]

Then, in the mid-1980s, came reports that gains by minorities, blacks in particular, might be eroding. In broadcasting and other mass media, as in education, women were said to be progressing while blacks were standing still or even moving backward.[11]

Erosion is a gradual process. Whereas blacks and other minorities entered broadcast news witn publicized wholesale hirings in the late 1960s and early 1970s, their exit, if there is such, may be so gradual as to go unnoticed.

National surveys of minorities and women in broadcast news have been conducted by the author almost annually for several years under sponsorship of the Radio-Television News Directors Association. The RTNDA survey reports have tended to find progress for women but not for minorities from one year to the

next.[12] Differences in the minority work force across 12-month periods have been too small for strong inferences that blacks or others were not only failing to progress, but were losing ground.

The present study re-examines RTNDA survey data for the past 10 years to look for trends in the employment of minorities in broadcast news, particularly for long-term changes which may have been hardly perceptible in year-to-year comparisons.

METHOD

The RTNDA surveys used essentially the same method from 1976 to 1986. In summer, questionnaires were mailed to news directors at the population of non-satellite commercial TV stations and at a systematic random sample of commercial radio stations with working addresses in the current Broadcasting Yearbook. Combined AM-FM news operations indicated by the yearbook received but one questionnaire per mailing. To assure that a second mailing went only to non-respondents, the first mailing's questionnaires were marked with station call letters before mailing. Identification was left blank on questionnaires mailed in the second wave, but at least 95 percent of those respondents normally filled in their identifications. Confidentiality was assured in a cover letter on RTNDA letterhead.

The number of non-satellite commercial TV stations grew from 644 in 1976 to about 800 in 1986. The sampling rate for radio, selected to provide respondents numbering within 100 of the cases for television, moved from every sixth of about 4,700 qualifying news operations in 1976 to every eighth of about 6,800 in 1986, after random starts. Response rates ranged from 54 percent in

1986 to 71 percent in 1979 for television and from 42 percent in 1976 to 48 percent in 1979 for radio. Numbers of cases ranged from 415 to 473 for television and from 330 to 400 for radio.

RESULTS

Work Force Shares

In the 10 years from 1976 to 1986, the minority share of the broadcast news work force decreased slightly, mainly through attrition by minority men, most notably blacks. As Tables 1 and 2 detail, white men lost part of their still strong majority to white women, who made remarkable gains during the period. Minority women's share showed little change.

In television news, the increased employment by minorities which had begun in the 1960s continued through the 1970s, leveled off in the early 1980s and turned into decreasing employment in the mid-1980s. The minority share of the TV news work force rose from 13.8 percent in 1976 to 15.1 percent in 1979 and dropped to 12.8 percent in 1986.

In radio news, the decline extended across the 10-year period and was small enough to fall within expected sampling error, but its consistency with the results for television tends to corroborate that erosion was taking place among minority men. Minority newspersons made up 10.2 percent of the total in radio in 1976, 9.9 percent in 1979 and 9.1 percent in 1986.

Black men accounted for most of the setback by minorities from 1979, when the surveys started counting minority men and women separately, to 1986. While the share of the news work

TABLE 1: Television News Work Force 1976-86

	1976	1979	1981	1984	1986
White Male	NA	64.2%	60.0%	60.1%	60.6%
White Female	NA	20.7	25.0	26.4	26.6
White Total	86.2%	84.9%	85.0%	86.5%	87.2%
Black Male	NA	5.9%	5.8%	5.3%	4.5%
Black Female	NA	3.6	3.5	3.1	3.2
Black Total	9.6%	9.5%	9.3%	8.4%	7.7%
Hispanic Male	NA	2.8%	3.1%	2.5%	2.3%
Hispanic Female	NA	1.0	.9	1.1	1.1
Hispanic Total	3.1%	3.8%	4.0%	3.6%	3.4%
Asian Male	NA	.6%	.6%	.5%	.6%
Asian Female	NA	.6	.6	.6	.7
Asian Total	.6%	1.2%	1.2%	1.1%	1.3%
Indian Male	NA	.3%	.3%	.2%	.2%
Indian Female	NA	.2	.2	.2	.2
Indian Female	.5%	.5%	.5%	.4%	.4%
Minority Male	NA	9.7%	9.8%	8.5%	7.7%
Minority Female	NA	5.4	5.2	5.0	5.1
Minority Total	13.8%	15.1%	15.0%	13.5%	12.8%
Male Total	80.4%	73.9%	69.8%	68.6%	68.3%
Female Total	19.6	26.1	30.2	31.4	31.7
Staff Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Total Staff Mean	16.2	19.7	23.7	25.4	25.0
N of Cases	413	472	348	461	435

TABLE 2: Radio News Work Force 1976-86

	1976	1979	1981	1984	1986
White Male	NA	67.9%	65.8%	65.7%	62.9%
White Female	NA	22.1	25.1	25.6	28.1
White Total	89.8%	90.0%	90.9%	91.3%	91.0%
Black Male	NA	3.3%	2.6%	2.1%	2.6%
Black Female	NA	3.0	3.2	2.7	2.8
Black Total	6.4%	6.3%	5.8%	4.8%	5.4%
Hispanic Male	NA	2.1%	1.6%	2.1%	1.7%
Hispanic Female	NA	.5	.8	.8	.6
Hispanic Total	2.4%	2.6%	2.4%	2.9%	2.3%
Asian Male	NA	.1%	.2%	.1%	.2%
Asian Female	NA	.3	.1	.2	.5
Asian Total	.5%	.4%	.3%	.3%	.7%
Indian Male	NA	.5%	.5%	.5%	.5%
Indian Female	NA	.2	.1	.2	.2
Indian Total	.9%	.7%	.6%	.7%	.7%
Minority Male	NA	6.0%	4.9%	4.8%	5.0%
Minority Female	NA	3.9	4.2	3.9	4.1
Minority Total	10.2%	9.9%	9.1%	8.7%	9.1%
Male Total	78.8%	74.0%	70.7%	70.5%	67.9%
Female Total	21.2	26.0	29.3	29.5	32.1
Staff Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Total Staff Mean	3.8	2.9	3.0	3.1	2.9
N of Cases	327	396	354	326	362

force for Hispanic men shrank slightly, it did not show the clear decline found for black men, who dropped back from 5.9 percent to 4.5 percent in television news and from 3.3 percent to 2.6 percent of the work force in radio news. Black women essentially held their own and, by 1981, outnumbered black men in radio news. Hispanic women showed no notable change in their very small share of the work force. Neither did male or female Asian American and Native American broadcast news employees.

White women claimed an ever increasing share of the jobs, a gain of 6 full percentage points from 1979 to 1986 both in TV and radio news. One of every four broadcast news employees last year was a white woman. One of every 20 in TV and 25 in radio was a minority woman. By the mid 1980s, there were signs that the gains by women were leveling off in TV but not in radio news. In both media, white and minority women comprised nearly a third of the work force. The standstill by minority women suggested a cancellation effect from female gains and minority losses.

Population Estimates

The work-force percentages enable estimates of employee numbers through calculations from mean staff sizes found in the surveys. TV news staffs in 1986 ended several years of steady growth, and the mean radio news staff was roughly one person smaller in 1986 than in 1976.

The total work force grew both in TV and radio news, in part because many new stations went on the air during the decade. Non-satellite commercial TV stations with working addresses increased from 644 in 1976 and 670 in 1979 to about 800 in 1986.

Commercial radio stations, with joint AM-FM news operations counted but once, increased from about 5,000 in 1976 and 1979 to 6,800 in 1986. The estimated total broadcast news work force at commercial stations grew from 29,600 in 1976 to 39,835 in 1986, an increase of 34.6 percent.

Population projections show even more dramatically how members of minority groups have lagged behind while women have moved ahead. The number of minority members of radio and TV news staffs was estimated at 2,228 in 1976 and 2,625 in 1986, an increase of 17.8 percent. Women, meanwhile, were going from about 6,100 to 12,715, an increase of 108.4 percent.

The greater progress by minority women than by minority men is also demonstrated more clearly by raw numbers. In 1979, the estimated population of radio and TV newspeople at commercial stations included 2,150 minority men, compared to 2,520 in 1986, an increase of 17.2 percent. Minority women moved up from an estimated 1,281 to 1,825, an increase of 42.5 percent.

The greatest setback for black men, not shown in the tables, was revealed in the most recent comparison. The estimated number of black men working in TV and radio news dropped from 1,725 in 1985 to 1,425 in 1986. The projection for black women held steady at about 1,200.

News Directors

Members of minority groups have made little progress in moving into the management of news operations. While gaining slightly in radio news, they edged backward in TV news. In 1981, the first year the minority status of news directors was

ascertained in an RTNDA survey, 3.9 percent of the responding TV news directors indicated minority status. Five years later, as Table 3 shows, the figure was down to 2.6 percent. In estimated population values, that translates to an estimated 27 minority TV news directors in 1981 and 21 in 1986. In radio, 4.5 percent, an estimated 247, of all news directors claimed minority status in 1981 and 5.5 percent, an estimated 374, did so in 1986.

Women, in the same five-year period, advanced from 9.4 to 13.8 percent of all TV commercial station news directorships. In estimated numbers, that's an increase from 65 to 110. Women doubled their numbers as radio news directors, moving from an estimated 886 (16.1 percent of 5,500 operations) in 1981 to 1,863 (27.4 percent of 6,800 in 1986).

Hispanics overtook blacks in their share of news directorships in television and were catching up fast in radio, where blacks were the dominant minority in 1981 but were not far ahead of Hispanics in 1986.

Most minority news directors in television were not heading major operations. The median TV news staff for all stations surveyed in 1986 consisted of 20 persons. Of the four black TV news directors completing questionnaires, all were male, two were at independent stations with staffs of six and 12, and two were at small-market network affiliates with staffs of 12 and 14. Of the five Hispanic news directors responding, three were women heading independent TV news staffs of two, five and seven persons; and two were men at small-market network affiliates with staffs of four and 21. An Asian-American man was news director at a medium-market network affiliate with a staff of 35. Thus, only

TABLE 3: Minority and Female News Directors 1981-86

	1981		1986	
	Sample Share	Population Estimate	Sample Share	Population Estimate
Television				
Black	2.1%	15	1.0%	8
Hispanic	.6	4	1.3	10
Asian American	.3	2	.3	3
Native American	.3	2	.0	--
Not Ascertained	.6	4	.0	--
Minority Total	3.9%	27	2.6%	21
Women	9.4%	65	13.8%	110
N of Cases	348	690	398	800
Radio				
Black	3.6%	198	1.7%	116
Hispanic	.3	16	1.2	82
Asian American	.0	--	.3	20
Native American	.0	--	1.4	95
Not Ascertained	.6	33	.9	61
Minority Total	4.5%	354	5.5%	374
Women	16.1%	886	27.4%	1863
N of Cases	354	5500	346	6800

two of 10 minority news directors were heading operations of even average size.

Female TV news directors were also found most often at small-staffed independent stations. Women were news directors at 41 percent of the independent stations and 9 percent of the network affiliates surveyed. Sixty percent of the female TV respondents in the survey were at independent stations, which accounted for only 21 percent of total stations. Median staff size was 8.8 for female and 24.3 for male TV news directors. White men remained in charge of news at most of the nation's network TV stations, the ones with the larger operations.

In radio, news staff size varied little by minority status. The typical minority radio news director headed a staff of two. The median for all news director was 2.2. Median staff size was 1.8 for female and 2.4 for male radio news directors.

DISCUSSION

There is reason for concern that not only have members of minorities failed to increase their share of the broadcast news work force in recent years, but that their share has even eroded. While women have impressively built their presence in radio and TV newsrooms, blacks and other minorities have been exiting more often than entering.

Black men, in particular, have been losing ground. These pioneers of the influx of minorities into broadcasting in the late 1960s and early 1970s are turning or being turned elsewhere. For black women, the female growth has tended to offset the

minority decline to leave the "double minority" about where they were 10 years earlier.

With their shares of the work force at 8 percent for TV news and 5 percent for radio news last year, representation by blacks was well below the roughly 12 percent of the U.S. population which they comprised.[13] However, the survey figures are in line with the black 6.7 percent of the nation's professional specialty work force.[14] Black men also held a larger share of the work force in broadcast news than the 2.9 percent found for American journalism as a whole.[15] While the electronic media showed a better record than print, blacks remain under-represented in broadcast news and the professions in general. Much the same applies to Hispanics. Meaningful comparisons are difficult for other minority groups, as their numbers are so few.

Meanwhile, women have progressed until their share of the broadcast news work force is just under a third. While impressive, that figure remains well under the roughly half of the nation's professionals which women comprise when teaching and health-related occupations are included. The female proportion for broadcast journalism is similar to the one for college faculties, which are now about a third female.[16]

Under-representation of minorities is far greater in management than in the rank and file jobs of broadcast news. Very few non-whites are news directors -- upward of 3 percent in television and 6 percent in radio last year. Broadcast news trails other occupational areas in this respect. Blacks, for example, were estimated to hold 5.4 percent of the nation's executive, administrative and managerial positions in 1986,[17] but

were news directors at only 1 percent of the TV and 1.7 percent of the radio stations surveyed.

Furthermore, most of the few minority news directors in television hold relatively bush league positions, heading low-budget operations, as female news directors also tend to do, but to a lesser extent. A few major league positions have gone to female news directors, but almost none to blacks, Hispanics or members of other minorities. Except at a few ethnic stations, broadcast management remains almost totally white.

The closed doors to managerial offices may be making broadcast news less attractive to minorities than a few years ago when they still had a dream of moving up in the power structure of the mass media. Repeatedly being passed over is said to be driving out minorities, who at the same time have been found to be more likely than whites to aspire to management positions.[18]

Decreased regulation of broadcasting may also have hurt minority opportunities. The Federal Communications Commission in recent years has not been considered as interested in matters of equal opportunity and affirmative action as was the FCC of the 1960s and early 1970s.[19]

Further study is needed. The present research only points up the failure by blacks and other minorities to achieve a place in television or radio news which is commensurate with their representation in society. Surveys of minority members who are working in the field and those who have left it might yield evidence as to why minority groups have been losing ground in broadcast journalism.

FOOTNOTES

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14 U.S. Department of Commerce Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment and Earnings (Jan. 1987), p. 36.

15 David H. Weaver and G. Cleveland Wilhoit, The American Journalist: A Portrait of U.S. News People and Their Work (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 22-25.

16 U.S. Department of Commerce Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment and Earnings (Jan. 1987), p. 35.

17 Ibid., p. 36.

18 Jonathan Alter, "No Room at the Top," Newsweek, Dec. 1, 1986, pp. 79-80.

19 Harris, loc. cit.